BOARD OF REGENTS
P. O. Box 3677
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-3677
Phone (225) 342-4253, FAX (225) 342-9318
www.regents.state.la.us

January 21, 2004 Contact: Kevin Hardy

Regents Voice Support For Statewide Optical Network Proposal

The Louisiana Board of Regents today expressed enthusiastic support for the concept of the Louisiana Optical Network Initiative (LONI), a proposed statewide, optical-fiber computer network with the potential to position Louisiana as one of the nation's top states in computer research network capacity. While there are still many details to work out, and, of course, funding sources must be secured, the Regents' response bodes well for the possibility of moving LONI from vision to reality.

The Board of Regents Technology Committee today heard the details of the LONI proposal from Dr. Ed Seidel, LSU professor of astrophysics and director of the university's Center for Computation Technology. Dr. Seidel spoke on behalf of a collaborative of research universities and state agencies supporting the development of LONI, including LSU, Louisiana Tech, Southern University, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Tulane, the University of New Orleans, and the Louisiana Department of Economic Development.

According to Seidel, LONI would allow computer research networking among universities at a speed 1000 times faster than current capacity. He said that the research capability afforded by LONI would not only put Louisiana universities in a position to access over one billion dollars in federal research grants from such sources as the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education and NASA, but it would also help Louisiana make a case for access to the proposed national Internet (I2) "backbone," which is currently configured to bypass the Interstate 10 corridor because most Gulf-South states lack the optical networks needed to take meaningful advantage of the system. I2 is a parallel internet system reserved exclusively for university and scientific research.

"Optical networks are the hottest thing in computing science since the introduction of the worldwide web," said Seidel. "Optical switching technology allows high-speed, collaborative research networking among institutions." Seidel cited potential applications that could be particularly useful to Louisiana, among them coastal erosion modeling and complex computer simulations to aid collaborative development of "nanotechnology," the science of manufacturing of microscopic devices and materials. Several Louisiana universities are already very involved in nanotechnology. "LONI's potential economic impact for Louisiana is considerable, from the influx of federal grant money to, to helping bring the national I2 backbone to the Gulf South, to attracting high-tech industries," Seidel said.

Members of the Regents Technology Committee were enthusiastic about the potential of the

Optical Network
ADD ONE

LONI concept, pledging the Board's backing to efforts to identify funding sources and devise a workable collaborative governance structure. They also urged Seidel and his colleagues to enlist the support of Louisiana's various postsecondary System boards as well. Early cost estimates put the initial price tag for LONI at around $25 million.

"It's an attractive proposal," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joe Savoie. "LONI is cross-functional and it has significant economic potential. It's entirely consistent with the vision we have for postsecondary education and for our state. It's also consistent with Governor Blanco's identification of technology as a high priority for her administration. There are several fronts on which [Regents] can help the investigation process along."

The Technology Committee instructed the Board of Regents staff to work with LONI stakeholders in evaluating the project's viability.

- 30 -